

5. PAINTED STORK *MYCTERIA LEUCOCEPHALA* (PENNANT) SWALLOWING A SNAKE

Painted storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*) are quite common in the environs of Delhi. These beautiful and elegant birds flock annually to breed in the large, natural heronries of the Delhi Zoological Park. Their breeding season lies between September and March, after which they fly away with the new brood and disperse into the countryside, till the next year. About their dietary habits it has been reported and also observed personally that they catch fish, frogs, insects etc. While feeding their young they regurgitate the contents of their crop into the nest or directly into the gaping mouths of the nestlings.

I have been studying some aspects of population dynamics of herons, and the Painted Storks, in the zoo for the past three months. On 19 October 1986 I noticed an adult stork in the nest, holding a peculiar prey in its mandibles. I first suspected it was a fish, but closer inspection through binoculars revealed that the animal in the bill was slender, long, shaped like a 'snooker stick' and did not have even the slightest suggestion of a caudal fin. The only longish fishes known to exist in the zoo ponds are some

species of *Channa* (murrel) and *Mastacembelus* (spiny eels). It is unlikely that the bird was holding any of these because no type of murrel can ever pass for a snake in appearance and most spiny eels have a prominent caudal fin or fin fold. However, water-snakes are quite common in these waters and every trip to the zoo results in one or two sightings.

After 5-6 minutes of deliberate effort the stork managed to swallow the snake in the head-on position, while it was still alive and waving its tail feebly. Thereafter, the bird bent down to feed the nestlings which had been clamouring hungrily for food all the while. However, the snake was not ejected immediately. According to Ali and Ripley (1968), Painted Storks may wait for considerable periods of time before disgorging the food in their crops. According to them 'possibly the delay in delivery is due to the necessity of predigesting the food for the young'.

February 13, 1987.

ABDUL JAMIL URFI

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6. BAER'S POCHARD IN PAKISTAN

I shot a Baer's Pochard (*Aythya nyroca baeri*) in district Gujrat (Punjab-Pakistan) near village Marala on 30th January 1957. This Marala is not the Marala of the upper Chenab Headworks but another place near Chilianwala, a battle-field during the second Sikh war.

The Marala marsh mardh covered more than 100 acres of a depression in an otherwise flat plain. It was amongst the earliest water logged areas to appear as a result of the canal irrigation. The depth of the water varied from a few inches to about 2 feet at the deepest. Most of the area was covered by marsh grasses and rushes, with perhaps about one fifth of the area being clear water. The village buffalo herds graze the marsh.

The spring migration of the wildfowl had started and the numbers varied from day to day. A few days earlier there had been fewer birds, but on that day a new lot of birds, mostly common teal and Mallard,

seemed to have arrived. The previous night had been a moonless night and the morning turned out to be cloudy with gusts of high wind and hail. I do not remember there being any abnormal spell of weather.

It was a lone bird and had got up from a small patch of tall rushes. Picking it up, I found it was an unknown type. I had not seen one like it before and on consulting Finn's little book "The water-fowl of India and Asia", I thought it came nearest to the Baer's white-eye, but it should not have been so far west. There had been a small flight of the Common White-eye a few days earlier, but I do not remember seeing any on that day. It had fluttered among the rushes when getting up but had risen straighter up than a common white eye. It was a female on the evidence of its ovary. It did not appear to be wounded or sick.

I had to go away early next morning and so could

keep only the head, a wing and a foot, which I sent to the Shooting Times, London, who forwarded them to the British Museum (Natural History). Mr. R. W. Sims of the Bird section wrote to me, "The bird appears to be of the eastern race, *Aythya nyroca baeri*; this is probably a first record from the Punjab". In reply to a further query by me, he replied, "The words 'the bird appears to be' are used because

identification rests on only the head. It is therefore remotely possible that, occasionally, birds of the western race can be atypically pigmented. Personally I feel that there is little doubt that your bird is of the eastern race".

December 3, 1986.

HAIDER JANG

7. AN INTERESTING COLOUR PHASE OF THE LESSER GOLDENBACKED WOODPECKER (*DINOPIUM BENGHALENSE*)

On 29th September 1986, Vijay Shrimali spotted a strange woodpecker and as happens regularly, most of the staff of the Centre for Environment Education, from the Director down were out in the Centre's garden looking at the new bird! It was a Goldenbacked Woodpecker but with a difference: the entire body, apart from a light golden back and a crimson crest, was white with a light creamy tint. The crimson crest indicated the bird was a male. The

bird was spectacularly beautiful and was not an albino as proved by the golden back, crimson crest and dark eyes. Later the unusual bird was shown to Shree Shivraj Kumar Khacher and he was able to watch it at eye level on a tree trunk at a distance of less than 3 meters!

October 4, 1986.

LAVKUMAR KHACHER

8. UNUSUAL FEEDING BEHAVIOUR IN THE ADJUTANT STORK *LEPTOPTILOS DUBIUS* (GMELIN)

On the morning of 8th January 1986 at about 0800 hrs., we came across an Adjutant Stork swallowing large pieces of vertebral column at a garbage dump at Tezpur (Sonitpur district) in Assam.

The garbage dump being a major site for the town's waste matter disposal is regularly frequented by 3 species of vultures (*Gyps benghalensis*, *Gyps indicus*, *Gyps fulvus*), Pariah Kite, (*Milvus migrans govinda*) and Adjutant Stork (*Leptoptilos dubius*). During one such observation on these birds we came across an unusual feeding behaviour of the Adjutant Stork. The stork was trying to swallow pieces of vertebral column as also some offal. Initially the stork picked up one of the pieces and tried swallowing it. This piece measured not less than 30 cm in length and belonged to a buffalo calf. This was confirmed by regular visits. In spite of the size of the

vertebral column the stork successfully managed to swallow the piece after a lot of effort. The whole operation was repeated 5 minutes later by the same bird when another piece (about the same size as the first) was swallowed. About 10 minutes before this incident the same adjutant stork was seen feeding on a carcass along with 110 Whitebacked vultures, 4 Longbilled vultures, 4 Fulvous Griffon vultures and 7 Adjutant Storks.

Fishes, frogs, reptiles, crustaceans and carrion form the major food of this stork (Ali and Ripley 1983). Panday (1974) has reported the swallowing of maimed ducks by Adjutant Storks.

May 2, 1987.

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